

**A HISTORY OF  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY AFRICAN  
LITERATURES**

EDITED BY OYEKAN OWOMOYELA



# **A HISTORY OF TWENTIETH- CENTURY AFRICAN LITERATURES**

*Edited by Oyekan Owomoyela*

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS

# A HISTORY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY AFRICAN LITERATURES

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*To the memory of John F. Povey*

Introduction

English Language Literature from West Africa

English Language Literature from East Africa

English Language Literature from Southern Africa

French Language Literature

Portuguese Literature

English Language Drama and Theater

French Language Literature

Portuguese Literature

English Literature

Portuguese Literature

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## Acknowledgments

Sometime in 1984 the editor-in-chief of the University of Nebraska Press asked if I would consider editing a volume on the history of twentieth-century African literatures. I eagerly embraced the opportunity, because I shared his conviction that such a book was both necessary and of potentially great appeal to a sizeable audience. Furthermore, the interest of the press in the subject represented a major advance for African literary studies, and African studies in general—the addition of another top-flight university press to the number making African material available to the serious reader.

The volume makes its appearance now several years behind schedule owing to the difficulties inherent in assembling commissioned original essays according to the timetable I naively established at the start. I have since learned from those with more experience in such ventures that the delays are quite typical. They have nonetheless tested the patience and dedication of those contributors whose chapters came in on schedule.

My greatest gratitude is due, therefore, to my contributors, who have borne with good grace the frustration of long delays in seeing the fruition of their efforts. I hope they will agree that the result has been worth the wait.

Several passages in the following chapters have been translated from other languages. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations have been by the contributing authors. For the rest, I bear the responsibility for whatever flaws the texts contain.



## Introduction

In the half millennium that has elapsed since Christopher Columbus's fateful "discovery" of the New World, humankind has experienced profound revolutions directly related to Columbus's voyage and those of the European explorer-adventurers who came after him. Nowhere has the impact of those revolutions been more dramatic than on the African continent, for as a consequence of the voyages Africa quickly became an object of European attention—as either an obstacle or a restocking facility for ships on their way to the spices of the Indian Ocean, as a treasure trove of possessions to be transferred from one European power to another in treaties concluding intra-European wars, as a source of slave labor for the new plantations in the Americas, and as a group of colonies supplying European empires with raw materials, markets for finished goods, and career opportunities for European civil servants.

That original relationship between Europe and Africa has undergone many transformations in the past five centuries. The last of these was decolonization—the formal termination of imposed European rule and the resultant transfer of power to Africans. The colonizers finally acknowledged the inevitability, and even desirability, of that process in the years following World War II, when they began the belated work of cultivating suitable Africans to assume power on the departure of their European rulers. The transformation, observers agree, is still in progress. What is important for our purpose is that, as an integral part of that process, African literatures, essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon, came into being.

In this volume Africa is conceived as a cultural entity, not a geographic entity. Accordingly, the book excludes the countries of North Africa, for while they share some historical experiences (such as colonialism) with the countries below the Sahara, they are in fact Arab in culture, outlook, and lingua franca, and they perceive themselves to be part of the Arab world. The literatures discussed in the following pages, therefore, are those of the sub-Saharan countries, which share a cultural unity. Another result of this cultural conception of Africa is the exclusion of the literature produced by European and other foreign settlers on the continent, past and present. A partial exception is that of the white community of South Africa: the perva-

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